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Subject: God's Mercy Independent of Sects  
or Churches.

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OF

## SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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## GOD'S MERCY INDEPENDENT OF SECTS OR CHURCHES.

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"And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, etc."—Acts xxii. 21-23.

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This was piety. These were God's people. These were Jews. They were vindicating their religion. They were defending the sanctity of the temple. They were showing how much they valued orthodoxy. They were zealous; and a pretty work they made of their zeal. We must go back a little, to understand it fully.

We read, in the chapter preceding this, that Paul, after he had preached about thirty years, and was approaching the termination of his career, went back to Jerusalem; when James, and the other elders that were there, informed him that there was a great prejudice existing in the Church at Jerusalem, because he had apparently broken off from Jewish customs and the Jewish worship, and, as it were, set up another Church for himself. The language is unmistakeable:

"They are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs."

What advice did they give him, assuming it to be untrue that he did not believe in the Mosaic ceremony, and rating him as a faithful adherent of the Jewish Church and customs? They advised him to go into the temple, with certain others who had a vow upon them, to have sacrifice made for himself when sacrifice was made for them, and to pay charges in the sight of the people; so that everybody should have positive testimony that Paul, when he had preached thirty years, still believed in the Jewish Church, and did not believe that, to become a Christian, he must necessarily separate himself from Judaism.

Well, the apostle, for the sake of quieting the Church in Jerusalem, went into the temple, and performed expiatory rites. It is very hard steering, where the channel is narrow, so that if you avoid the rocks on one side, you are not in danger of being swept by the current on the other; and so it befell Paul; for while he was thus in the temple, acting under the advice of the Christian elders, the Jews that did not believe in Christ saw him there, and raised a great commotion.

“When the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help; this is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place; and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.” “And all the city was moved, and the people ran together; and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple; and forthwith all the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar; who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them; and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating Paul. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude; and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. And the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him. And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. And when he had given him license, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying, Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defense which I make now unto you.”

What a power there is in language! These men had been accustomed from the cradle, to hear everything that belonged to the heart and the hearth spoken in the Hebrew tongue; and when this man spoke to them in that, their mother tongue, it is said, “They kept the more silence.” It hushed them, so that a whisper might have been heard. Then he gives them some account of his conversion. They were interested in that; for everybody likes to hear personal narratives. He got on very well, and was evidently swaying them somewhat to his mind, when he fell upon this unlucky sentence:

“I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee. And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by and consenting unto his death, and kept

the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart; for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles."

There is no power in that to us, but there was power in it to them, and a tremendous explosion ensued :

"They gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: it is not fit that he should live."

And then, after the manner of the Jews, they "cast off their clothes and threw dust into the air;" thus expressing their utter indignation.

You have seen, perhaps, how the enraged bull in the pasture paws, and throws dirt upon himself, bellowing, as he prepares himself for battle. The wild beast that was in these men took gesture and posture scarcely different. Red-faced, fiery-eyed, and fierce, they surrounded the steps of the castle of the chief captain, and demanded that this man should be slain. For what purpose? What had he done? Why, he had said that God had sent him to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. That is all. Preaching to the Gentiles was his offense. You do not see it. You cannot imagine it. I think you will, before I am done with this discourse, imagine pretty nearly what the feeling is; for although in you it does not take precisely this historic form, I think you will understand the feeling that prompted them.

Now, if Paul had said that the Gentiles were all to be gathered into the Church, and were to bow down and acknowledge the name of Jehovah, and that he was sent forth to bring them into submission to the Jews, they would have smiled, and with eager exultation, with hallelujahs, peradventure, they would have claimed him; for, from the earliest period, they had been wont to believe that the day would come when the Jewish God would reign over all the earth. Were not all lands to be given to them? Were they not to sit regnant and brilliant upon the summit of authority? Were they not to do to other nations what other nations had done to them? Were not the scorn and humiliation and degradation which they had suffered to be paid double? Were not they the people of God? And were not the prophets all aglow with the prediction that the time would come when, by the light of the Jewish religion, Jehovah should be made known, and should be worshiped in all the earth?

Ah! there was no prejudice against having the Gentiles made—what? Jews: but to have the Jewish God given to the Gentiles without the instrumentality of the Jews; to have their God distributed outside of themselves by another instrumentality; to have other people enjoy the same right in Jehovah that they did, stand-

ing on the same level,—this was what they could not endure. To carry the Jews' God out from Judea, and make him a God of the Romans, and of the Greeks, and of the Scythians, and of the Parthians, and of the Assyrians—that was what offended them.

National gods, in old times, were very valuable property. It used to be supposed that the gods of a nation were very much to it what armies and navies are to a nation now-a-days. It was supposed that they defended it; that they took care of it; that they hated other nations that were its adversaries. The idea that Jehovah was a national God, and that he was the God of the Jews, who did not wish their enemies to participate in his power or in his protection, runs through all Jewish history.

If one should come into your house, and take all your pictures, and books, and furniture, and provisions, and distribute them along the whole street, you would doubtless raise some objection; if one should come to my table, and receive hospitality at my hands, and then take all my property and scatter it up and down the street, I should not like it; and men felt very much so about their religion in those old times. It was a part of their national household goods. The Jews' idea was that God was their special property; and to give the world the same right in him that they had, was just so much to defraud them.

The Jews were peculiarly susceptible to these ideas of appropriation, because, for the sake of their faith, and in order to defend the name of Jehovah against idolatry, they had suffered much persecution, and undergone many hardships.

You will observe that when men propound truths which are not popular, and defend them, and they begin to be popular, they claim to be are their special guardians. "It is our faith," they say. You shall hear certain parties saying of others who have adopted their principles, "They are coming over to our ground." So in religion, when men have set forth views that are unwelcome, but true, and other men at last begin to accept them, they say, "We had the right of it. Did not we tell you they would have to take our views?"

Men appropriate truth to themselves; they make it personal, as if they owned it; as if it belonged to them; and so the Jews felt that, as they had defended Jehovah, doubtless he must be grateful to them; that as they had suffered for him, they had a right to parcel him out; that he ought to be a gift from them; and to use Jehovah as the property of all mankind, was to level the Jew to the plane of other men. This would be humiliation and disgrace to them, since they felt themselves to be ineffably superior to the rest

of the world ; and they would not bear the degradation, if they could help it.

The spirit of the Jews in this respect is nowhere more strongly exposed and more keenly rebuked than in the interview between Christ and the Syro-Phenician woman, when she asked for the healing of her daughter, and his disciples besought him to send her away. He answered her, saying, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs"—referring to the fact that she was not a Jew. The Jews felt that if men were not Jews they were not much better than dogs. They thought about the Gentiles very much as the members of one Christian sect do about those of another, in our day. The Syro-Phenician woman said, "Truth, Lord ; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." And then Christ, in the benignity of his nature, granted her request.

From the outbreak of religious intolerance and religious cruelty rerecorded in the text we may learn several lessons.

First, it is possible to hold religion in a malignant spirit. So long as religion is understood to be an external system of ceremonies, laws, usages, ordinances ; so long as it consists of a series of beliefs ; so long as it is an objective thing, embodied in usages and institutions, or in philosophical creeds ; so long as it appeals to the outward senses,—it is quite possible to cherish it at the same time with those feelings which belong to the bigoted partisan.

Unfortunately, that which we have seen among the Jews, we have never ceased to see among men who have held the great institutions of Christianity, or institutions that have purported to be Christian,—that they held them in rancor, pride, and selfishness, and defended them with bitterness. Christ was one who, "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God ; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ; and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." He was a sufferer, who died for his enemies ; who died imploring blessings upon his persecutors ; whose mission to earth was good will and peace ; who shed his own blood, but never a drop of the blood of another. He was the loving, atoning Saviour. And what has been the history of the Church that represented his disinterested suffering, the bounty of his love, and his benignity to his hating and hateful enemies ? The long record of Church history has been a record almost unvarying of arrogance, and pride, and violence, and persecution. Men have received the religion of Jesus Christ, just as the Jews re-

ceived the religion of the Old Testament, to hold it in carnal bonds with most malignant human passions.

Is the same spirit existing now which broke out in this tumult among the Jews? Do men hold religion in the same malignant way that they did? Is there the same jealousy in respect to the partition of the benefits of Christ that there was in respect to the diffusion of the knowledge of Jehovah? What has been the history of the sects? and what is to-day the feeling of the sects? Is the Roman Catholic Church unwilling that all the world shall have all the benefits of the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ? Oh, no. The Roman Catholic Church stands saying to all the world, "Come into our Church, and under our regulations, and you shall have the Saviour. But you cannot have the Saviour outside of our Church. Come to us and you shall have him, but you cannot have him and leave us out."

Are the derivative churches, are the hierachal churches, are the Protestant churches, in spirit, different from the Roman Catholics? Are good men, learned men, wise men, unwilling that Christ should be preached among the Gentiles—that is, among dissenters? Oh, no. Is the Episcopal Church unwilling that the truth of Jesus should be made known to outsiders? Oh, no. It is more than desirous that they should all have the bounty and blessing that is in Christ; but then they must have it in the true Church. They must have it in the line of apostolicity. "Suppose," it is asked, "one should come to the Saviour without coming in that line, would there be any hope for him?" "Very doubtful. Possibly there might; the mystery of God is great; nobody can tell what he may do; but it is very unsafe to trust to any other channel. Take him in the Church, and you will be sure to be safe; but if you take him outside, you run a great risk." This is all the encouragement we get from that source.

Well, let us take the great Calvinistic Presbyterian Church. May any one have Christ's atoning mercy, and the hope of everlasting life? Yes, if he believes in the absolute sovereignty of God; in original sin, with enough of actual transgression added to it; in regeneration; in the efficacious compassion and suffering and death of Christ; in divine penalty; and in the eternity of future punishment. "Come into our creed," says that church, "and you shall have the mercy and blessing of God." "Yes, but," says a Unitarian to the Calvinist, "is not God my God? "What! your God? *Yours?* What is your belief? Do you believe as we do?" "No, I do not." "Well, no man has a right to call himself a Christian who does not believe in the fundamental doctrine. Come into our

creed, and then God will be your God, and Christ will be your Christ ; but if you stay where you are, off from our ground, there is no God for you, and no Christ. What have you Gentiles to do with our Presbyterian God and Christ ? ”

There are orthodox Congregational churches, with good sounddeacons, and wise, intelligent laymen in them. How is it with them ? There is a great outside world of men who scarcely know the sabbath, or go to church, or attempt to follow Christ in any way. What is their feeling ? What is your feeling ? How were you educated ? How was I educated ? You feel that all who have been brought to believe in the right doctrine (your doctrine, that is), the right ecclesiastical economy, are Christians.

Now, may a man who does not believe in the eternity of punishment, may a man who has doubts in respect to the mode of atonement, may a man who is a Swedenborgian, a Unitarian, a Universalist, or a Jew, may a man who has no special religious culture, say that God is his God, and have hope in him ? “ No,” you say ; “ if he will give evidence of holding the right views, if he will come over to our ground, if he will comply with our requisitions, then Christ will be ready to receive him. We have Christ with us. Whoever comes here can have him, but he cannot go out there to them.”

It is the Jewish state of mind over again. It is the same spirit which they manifested who shook their raiment, and threw dust in the air, and clenched their hands, and gnashed their teeth, and cried out against Paul, and demanded that he should be torn to pieces. They were advocating Jehovah, standing up for God, taking care of religion ; and every one of them would have said, “ We desire that every human creature on earth should have the blessing of God, only he must come to us and get it ; it will be presumptuous, audacious, awful, for him to hope for anything from God if he does not come to us.”

In this regard, human nature is pretty much the same all the way through. There is everywhere the same conceit ; the same arrogance ; the same exclusiveness. “ What we have is right. Of that there is no mistake. And for those who are outside our ecclesiastical connection, and are not of our way of believing, there is nothing but darkness.”

It may be true that men are in a dangerous condition, it may be true that they need light ; but that does not excuse the feeling with which men carry what are called the doctrines of grace, in which you believe, and in which I believe, but which we may hold in an unchristian spirit, in a selfish spirit, in a spirit of

overweening pride, in a spirit not to be distinguished from that of the worst political parties in the world.

What, then, is the truth? God, as he has taught both in the Old Testament and in the New, is *God over all, blessed forever*; and all men, from the rising of the sun until the going down of the same, have children's rights in God as their Father. All men have a right to take part and lot in him, and to hope in him. This is the doctrine of the Bible; and I think it is the doctrine of a just, and right, and true Christian love.

God is the God of all the earth. He belongs to no sect, to no party. He has given to no class the right to appropriate him. He has given to none the authority to parcel him out, or to administer his promises.

There is not a creature on the face of the earth that is not dear to God. We are accustomed to think that Christians have God, while the heathen have him not; but do you know that seven men out of every ten on the face of the earth are heathen? And do you believe that God brings into life generations, in numbers as countless as the drops of the sea, or as the drops of dew; do you believe that God creates the vast uncountable multitude of mothers, fathers, children, young men and maidens, swarming through Africa, through Asia, through all the latitudes of the world, and that only two or three out of every ten are his children, all the rest, as they are brought in through successive ages—myriads, myriads, myriads of them—being nothing to him? Is not God, One who “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust”? You might as well appropriate the rain, and parcel out the sunshine, and say that none shall have one or the other except on social and moral conditions, as to say that none shall have God, or Christ, or hope, or salvation, except such as hold a certain belief, or belong to a given sect. They are universal, and belong to whosoever will take them.

God is the God of every human being on earth, no matter whether he worships in this temple or in that, in this attitude or in that; no matter whether he belongs to the true church, or a dissenting church, or no church at all; no matter whether he speaks the language of Zion or not. There is not a man in the world, whether he be rich or poor, high or low, good or bad, toward whom God's feelings are not feelings of the utmost benignity and loving mercy. God is long-suffering and gentle toward the Ethiopian, the Calmuck, the Indian of the forest, the most benighted races on the globe, as well as toward the most favored

nations. There is not a man so imperfect, or so full of infirmity, that God does not care for him and sustain him ; and the best men living are pensioners on divine grace and bounty. If God takes the worthiest of his creatures, out of the fullness of his own graciousness, and not on account of their desert, can he not take the others also, out of that same graciousness ? And does he not take them ? The whole tide of the divine thought through the world is a thought of goodness ; the whole heart-beat of God along the earth is a heart-beat of mercy ; and that thought, that heart-beat, is for all mankind. God is working for them, he is shaping his providences for their benefit, and that just as much when he chastises them as when he gives them pleasure. He is preparing them for something better than this life. God is the workman of heaven. He is a God of versatile industry, and great patience, working everywhere in every region, for righteousness; to develop it, and nourish it, and bring it to a higher and higher level, that the whole earth may see his salvation.

“ Well, then, do I understand,” you will say, “ that an unconverted man is as good as a converted man ? ” No, I do not say that, at all. But if you were to ask me, “ Who owns the sun ? ” I should say, “ Nobody owns it ; it belongs to the globe, and everybody has a right to it.”

Here are men that go down to the great deep, and do business upon its mighty waters ; they understand all the currents, all the obstructions, all the winds, all the signs in the heavens, and all the tokens on the earth ; and they make long and successful voyages. But there goes out on the ocean a man without compass, or chart, or experience, in a rickety boat : has he not a right to go out thus ? Certainly. Has he the same chance of success that the men have who go out with experience, and all these other helps ? Oh no, he has not the same chance ; but he has the same right to go.

Here are men who are surrounded by ten thousand climatic influences which may be turned to good account ; but they never reap ample harvests. Why ? Because they do not know how to make use of those influences in cultivating the soil. Those who do, sow their seed, and reap abundant harvests. There is a vast difference in the results of these men’s farming ; and yet, the sun stands offering as much to one as to another.

Now, it is with God’s mercy as it is with the sunlight. What does the sunlight bless ? It blesses industry, integrity, knowledge. It is ready to bless everybody who will partake of its bounty. The right to it is not conferred by magistrate, legislature or gov-

ernment. Sunlight is everybody's ; and yet, everybody does not get good out of it. It is shame to some ; it is torment to others ; it is rebuke to others ; and it is blessing, endless and fathomless, to yet others. Whether it is beneficial to a person or not depends upon how he uses it.

The mother loves her children ; and yet has that recreant son who has burst the bonds of parental authority, and gone to associate with gamblers and men of license, the same benefit from that mother's love which those children have who cling to her ? Has her heart forsaken him and forgotten him ? Does not her heart go out after that son, and does she not offer prayer after prayer to God in behalf of the wanderer ? That mother is not the same to him that she is to the other children ; but the cause of the difference is in him, and not in her.

God's love and mercy and bounty are universal, and men appropriating them find them personally useful ; but rejected and excluded, they find them no good.

Two men are walking in a garden. One walks in the alleys, and everywhere sweet and pleasant shade falls upon him ; the fragrance of the orange greets him on every side ; he enjoys all the beauty of prodigal luxuriance ; he is surrounded by blossoming flowers and ripening fruits ; and to him it is a garden of grand delights. The other man lies drunk under the shade of a tree. There are the same fruits, the same flowers, the same fragrance for him that there is for the other man, only he is not in a condition to appropriate them. One goes out of the garden full of gladness, and laden with its treasures. The other has no more of the garden than if he had never seen it. It is the nature of the men, and not any partiality in the garden, that makes the difference.

We are prepared, then, to answer some questions.

May an unconverted man pray to God ? This is a question which has disturbed many persons. Some think that when they are Christians they have a right to pray, but not till then. But why may not any one pray to God ? What is there in nature or reason that should hinder ? Praying is itself an act of submission. It recognizes sovereignty and authority. The desire to pray is not altogether selfish. It is associated with an acknowledgement of divinity. And does a man need to go through a technical experience inside of a church before he has a right to pray to God ? There is no man that wants to pray who has not a right to pray.

But can a man who has an unsanctified heart make a prayer that shall be acceptable to God ? Do you suppose there is a man who ever utters a prayer, every sentence of which is not stained with pride

and selfishness and infirmity? And is there not a spirit which "maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered"? Is it true that God has fenced himself about so that those who have gone away from him cannot get back?

If my child had wandered from me, and dishonored my name, and wrought mischief, and, after many years, had come back in poverty, and I heard his voice, at midnight, saying, "Father, let me in," is there anything in my fatherhood, low and ignoble as it is, comparatively, which would not be stirred? If he said, "I have sinned, and I am in want, and I have come back for help: help me," would I cast him off? Is there a father here that would cast off such a child? And is there a creature on the face of the earth that has sunk so deep in wickedness that, if he cries out to God for help, God will not hear him and help him? If you are weighed down by sin, and you wish to be saved, though you are almost sure that you will fall under temptation to-morrow, you have a right to lift up your voice, and cry, "God help me." God is sorry for men, even while he is chastising them for their sins.

You remember how, in that inimitable parable of the Prodigal Son, when he had gone away from his father's house, and wasted his substance with harlotry and riotous living, in his deep degradation, at last, he came to himself, and said, "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off his father saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

There is earthly paternity, taken as a symbol and emblem of the divine feeling. When men have gone wrong, and are in rags, in beggary, in degradation, the moment they turn the face of desire toward God, that moment God meets them, and does exceedingly abundantly more for them than they can ask or think.

Take heart, then, sinning, wicked, desponding man! If there is nobody else that cares for you, God cares for you. If every tongue is out against you; if all manner of prejudices hedge up your way; if the church has surrounded you with obstacles, God thinks of you, and will help you. You have an interest in the heart of Jesus; and if God be for you, who can be against you? Therefore, take courage.

You are not a churchman? You are not much educated in matters of religion? Ah, but you know something of sin. You have

felt its pang. You desire to be released from its grasp. And you are not aware how strong is the mercy of God, and what right you have in Christ. A sinner no right in God ! Think a moment, my friend. What is God but a spirit ? He is not limited to any place. He is not a regnant sovereign with crown and scepter ; with officers and revenues, with an army and navy : he is a Spirit. He is just and merciful and loving. And has not a sinner a right to justice and mercy and love ? Has he not a right to a Saviour ? May he not partake of divine goodness ? Especially has he not a right to invoke God's blessing ?

It is because God is what he is, that all men have rights in him. It once used to be said that men had no rights which God was bound to respect. A better thought has come over the Christian community. Men have rights ; God gave them, and they are at liberty to exercise them. Has not a child rights, because his parent is his superior, and has authority over him ? The law says, Yes ; public sentiment says, Yes ; and the voice of nature says, Yes. And because a man is formed subordinate to God, and under his authority, has he not rights of mercy, of justice, of love, and of truth ?

May we hope, then, that the dissolute and the wicked shall have mercy ? Not while they employ their dissoluteness and wickedness cheerfully and gladly as the end and purpose of their life. There is not a man that lives who has not a right to food, and, through food, to strength, and, through strength, to executive efficiency. Men also have the right to joy—manly joy. Yet, you say to me, “ May a man have joy, though he be an old glutton, swollen with a superabundance of blood ? ” Why, yes ; but not as a glutton. If he will become temperate, and purge away his humors, and restrain himself to due moderation, he may. If I am cold, and wish to protect myself against the weather, I can, if I will seek the proper shelter. If I am shivering on the north side of a rock, I can get warm if I have a mind to, but not so long as I remain on the north side.

There are infinite mercies of God toward men ; and all are wicked, for there is not a man on earth who is righteous, perfectly so, not one. Every man is imperfect in this mortal state. We are working toward a condition of perfection which we hope to reach in other spheres, but not in this. The earth, therefore, is covered with sinful men. Nevertheless, the bounty of God is proffered to each. And it is received and enjoyed by all who take it as it is to be taken.

If, then, there be any here who have looked over the pale of the

church, and felt, "If I could only get in there, I should have hope, but while I stand out here, what hope can I have?" let me tell you that the mercy of God is as much yours out of the church as in it. The condition of divine favor, of pardon, and of salvation, is not that you shall be inside of any church; is not that you shall be Jew or Christian in the sectarian sense; is not that you shall be in the Roman, or Episcopal, or Presbyterian, or Baptist, or Methodist, or Congregational, or Lutheran, or Unitarian, or Universalist, or any other church. What you want is simple personal sympathy with God, who is above all churches, and who is offered to men without any regard to churches.

It is true that a man may be more likely to come into an intelligent knowledge of God, and his requirements and promises, in the sanctuary than out of it; it is true that there is a provision for moral influence in churches that does not exist outside of them; and far be it from me to say that a church is worthless, but church-membership is not a condition of divine kindness and forgiveness. You have these on account of that which is in God. That which makes him God is that he has a great nourishing bosom, a great glowing soul of love, which he bestows freely upon his creatures. Divine love is a gift. It is never bought, either by obedience, or by moral excellence, or by service rendered, or by right believing. The help which we receive from God is a gift springing out of the infinite resources of his love. But there are external and incidental helps. Churches are helps—not masters; servants—not despots. You are free.

God is the God of all the earth; he is the God of every human being; and nothing separates between you and God but—what? Your creed? No. Your ordinances? No. Your pride and selfishness? Do these turn God sour? No. Nothing separates between you and God but your own will. Here I stand, holding out a handful of gold; but can a man receive that gold unless he comes and puts out his hand and takes it? No. Still the hand is open and held out to him. So long as men clench their fists they cannot take it, but if they will open their hands and make the necessary movement, they can.

Do you know that your father and mother wait at home for you? Do you know that the anger is not cool in your bosom which drove you away from them? Do you strive with yourself? Do you say, "I have disgraced myself and them"? and does your pride stand guarding your sense of shame, which is struggling within you? Do you know that your father and mother long for you still? Oh, child! daughter of their love! do you know that day and night

are one long season of yearning on their part for you ? And are you kept away from them, not only by your pride and shame, but by the influence of companions ? And so long as you stay where you are, does it seem to you as if you had no home ? You are deprived of the enjoyments of home, but it is not their fault : it is yours.

Much of God's bounty, and forgiveness, and help, and succor, will come upon you, at any rate, through the incidental influence of divine providence ; but the personal mercies of God, the sweet-ness of his grace, the effluence of his love—these may be yours, they may succor you, restore you, strengthen you, inspire you, and build you up in time for eternity, *if you will* ; but it all lies with you.

Are there not those here to whom this is a needed gospel ? If there are any who have been taught to believe that they must comply with conditions which seem obnoxious to their reason, and impossible to the nature of the human mind, slough off the old teaching, and come back to the simplicity of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and say, “Our Father which art in heaven.” A soul that can say that, and feel it, is God's. Dismiss all the long inventory of doctrines ; dismiss the Confession and the Creed, for the time being, and bring yourself into personal relations with God, and breathe the language of filial love, at the altar, to the Father—*our Father*.

Are there not those who cannot say that ? Do you think you must make long investigation ; that you must study to find the right church ; that you must endeavor to ascertain what the right doctrines are—what you are to believe ? I tell you, you know enough, a thousand times over, to fit you to begin a Christian life. You know what is just, and pure, and true, and right. You know what is reverent and comely toward God, as your Superior and Father. If you stay away, and do not receive the effulgence of universal bounty, it is because you will not. “I have called : ye have refused. I have stretched out my hand : no man regarded. Ye will not come unto me that ye may have eternal life,”—these are the utterances of sacred truth.

Now may God grant, oh men ! oh women ! moving silently through this world toward the eternal tribunal, and the fixed state, may God grant that, while the flowers are preparing themselves to open and take in the gracious sunlight, you may open your hearts to receive the shining of the Spirit. The voice of God calls. The divine influences wait. The whole heaven is full of love and mercy. And as, while the summer calls to the flowers and the birds, they glow and sing, so may you, when the heavens call to you, rise up, respond, rejoice, and be saved !

## PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

GREAT is our need of thee, O Lord our God. In every moment of our lives, how great is that kindness of thine by which, before we know our wants, they are supplied! Thy paths drop fatness. The heaven above hath heard thy command to service. The sun, and all the laws of nature are obedient to thy will, and ceaselessly they bring forth the pleasant fruit by which we are provided, day by day, with all that we need. And yet, behind all these causes is our God. Through whatever channel the work is done, thou art the Worker, and by whatever source we are helped, thou art the continual Helper. Thou art the Author, and thou shalt be the Finisher.

We rejoice in thy bounty. We give thanks to thee in the memory of the past. We are drawn to a more implicit trust in thee. Above all, we thank thee for the great grace which is given us through Jesus Christ, by which we have fellowship not only with him, but with the Father; by which we are permitted to enter into the holy of holies. No longer are we kept afar off. We are not strangers or foreigners. We are of the household of faith, brought near. Thou hast said to us, Henceforth I call you, not servants, but friends. We have heard of thy graciousness. Many of us know it. Thou hast spoken to our inward understanding. Thou hast pressed it home upon us that thou dost love us. We are beloved of God. We walk beneath the canopy which thou hast spread above us. No parent so cares for his children as thou dost care for us. Not a sparrow can fall without thy notice. Are not we worth more than many sparrows?

We rejoice in thy providence, and in the administration of nature; and these things are as nothing to the joy that we have in thy personal affection; in the grace of thy love; in the inspiration of thy Spirit; in all the hope which we have through thine immortality and blessedness.

And now, O Lord, we thank thee that since our eyes were opened in this world we have been instructed in these things. We have broken through ignorance slowly, and grown into this knowledge. We thank thee for all those formative influences by which faith is made easier; by which we stand with more implicit confidence; by which we see thee more perfectly, and realize thy presence more easily.

We pray that thou wilt keep us near to thyself, and fill us with all thy divine influences, that we may be able more and more to dismiss and put under our feet whatsoever is carnal,—passion, and appetite, and selfishness, and inordinate pride; and that we may grow more and more toward the majesty of thy love, and its perfect peace, and its fullness of kindness.

And we pray that thou wilt grant, this evening, upon all thy servants gathered together, the blessing which each one specially needs. Be gracious to those who are bending beneath trouble, and sanctify that trouble to them. In their night, shine forth with all thy stars. We pray that thou wilt not leave nor forsake them. Sanctify those wounds which seem to them incurable; those sorrows which they cannot bear, but are bearing.

And we beseech of thee, grant thy blessing upon those who are burdened outwardly, who are perplexed in worldly cares and business; and may they have such confidence and faith in thy providence, that they shall be able to endure manfully to the end.

Bless, we beseech of thee, those who are poor, and are struggling with temptation. Deliver them from evil thoughts and wrong desires. May they be patient, and content to await the evolution of the divine will. Grant that in the midst of doubt, and fear, and disaster, and disappointment, as well as in the midst of joy, and prosperity, and hope, and cheer, every one may be able to find thee a present help.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt glorify thyself among this people.

Bless all the families of this city, and the great city near us. Fill us with the divine Spirit. May the Gospel which has made us rich and happy spread through this great land, for the reformation of morals, and for the diffusion of knowledge.

Establish wise laws, for wise magistracy, and for the peace of the people.

We pray that thou wilt bless, not our nation alone, but all the nations of the earth. They wait for thee. They bear heavy burdens. Many walk in wickedness and in darkness. Oh, hasten that time when the power of God among men shall produce justice, and love, and when peace shall flow through all the domains of men.

Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Make bare thine arm of power. Come forth in the brightness of thy love. Overthrow thine enemies; lead them in blessed captivity; and reign in all the earth as thou dost in heaven.

And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son and Spirit, evermore. *Amen.*

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#### PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

OUR Father, we pray that thy truth may search out all that are within the sound thereof, and that it may enter into the heart. As the heat enters into the soil, to cause it to bring forth all its hidden treasures, so may the light of thy truth pierce every heart, and bring forth gracious affections. Teach all that are thine how dear they are to thee. May the love of God constrain them. May they accept the bounty and mercy of God in Christ Jesus their Lord.

Bless us as we sing again. Go home with us. Sanctify our homes. Prepare us in these earthly habitations for those mansions above, where thou art.

And to thy name, Father, Son and Spirit, shall be the praise. *Amen.*

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